

then I had it
and I held it up a moment
toasted them an almost
lyrical blessing
then drank it down
as the train
rolled and swayed
swayed and rolled
working me further and further
away
from those magic
people.

BRIGHT BOY

we were in one of those after-hour places.
I don't know how long we had been there.
I noticed a dead cigar in my hand, attempted
to light it, burned my nose ...

"you never met Randy Newhall?" the guy
next to me asked.

"naw"

"he got through college in 2 years instead
of 4 ..."

I got the barkeep to bring us a couple more
drinks.

"... he walked into the largest agency in the
world, they had 3,000 applications for this
one open position but he didn't fill one
out, he just talked to management for 15
minutes and he was hired ..."

"... uh"

"he began in the mailroom and in 6 months he
was arranging package deals for tv programs
and the movies ...
nobody ever got out of the mailroom that
fast, and next he married an intelligent girl
just out of law school..."

"yeah?"

"in his office he seemed to spend most of his
time putting his golf balls across the room.
he made work look easy ..."

"listen," I asked, "what time is it? the battery in my watch went dead"

"never mind ...

he was promoted to upper management and stopped putting ...

he was

the youngest man in America in such a position ..."

"you buy the next round," I told him.

"sure, well, he doubled his work hours and after a while his wife left him -- women don't understand ..."

"what?"

"guys like him."

"oh"

"he didn't contest the divorce ..."

"I didn't either"

"he just went ahead, that didn't stop him, he kept up his contacts, it was amazing, you'd see him having dinners with congressmen, with mayors ..."

"are you going to get the next round?"

he got the barkeep to bring two more.

"he got into it, he got into the 15- and 16-hour day, and after work he began frequenting an after-hour place above the strip, to relax, to let go ..."

"a place like this, huh?"

"this was the place ... he didn't close any deals here but he relaxed with the great, the actors, the artists, the screenwriters, the directors, the producers, the industrialists, and so forth ... and, of course, the many beautiful girls ..."

"here?"

"yes, look around ..."

I did.

"you're really funny sometimes"

"well, then, to get on ... he first tumbled onto coke, then more coke. mostly in sundry condos and homes after the after-hours places ..."

"flying, what?"

"yes, but in his upper management position he continued to function well ... then he got into H ..."

"kicks like a horse, huh? my round"

I ordered two more.

"and after some months, he felt more and more depressed, he took 6 weeks off and went to Hawaii, surfing, lying in the sun ..."

"did he screw?"

"he told me that he tried ... anyhow, he came back and he used to talk to me here just like you're doing now ..."

"oh, great"

"he became obsessed with this Mexican Real Estate Dream which he would front with a Mexican friend who was well adored as a great Mexican comedian, and the way he laid out the master plan of the M.R.E. Dream -- within 8 years he would control and indirectly own one-third of the Mexican nation, and from there on in it would only be a matter of going on to controlling one-third of this nation and that nation ... after that, it could be progressively upped until ..."

"drink up," I suggested, "then what happened?"

"well, he didn't quite get it rolling ... instead at the office he became snappish and cantankerous, throwing ashtrays, yanking the phone from the plug, once pouring a bottle of TAB down a secretary's blouse ... yet he retained a rather stylish, though obnoxious brilliance ... and he remained semi-functional which was better than most of those about ..."

"most don't have much"

"that's true ... anyhow, he began arriving at work dressed in a house-painter's outfit, you know, white overalls, including cap, and management gave him a 3-month furlough ..."

"BARKEEP!" I yelled, "COUPLE MORE!"

"he sold his house and moved into a small apartment on Fountain Avenue, and friends came by for a while, then they stopped coming around ..."

"suckerfish like winners"

"yes, and then there was a period when he tried to get back with his x-wife but she didn't want any more of that, she was with this young sculptor from Boston who was said to be immensely talented and who taught at one of the leading universities ..."

"horse dung"

"of course ...

anyhow, our friend has this second-floor apartment, as I told you, on Fountain Avenue, so ...

one day the manager who lived in the apartment below noticed this water leaking down through his ceiling ..."

"oh?"

"the manager went upstairs and knocked on the door, no answer, he took out his key and opened it, walked in and there was this guy, he was standing there with his head in the bathroom sink and the water was still running out of the tap and overflowing the sink and running to the floor, and the manager wasn't sure, you know, such things are strange, and he walked up and noticed that the head just stayed there in the sink, and the manager touched his legs, his back, and everything was stiff, r.m. had long ago set in, there he was standing with his head in the bathroom sink with the water running and the overhead light on ..."

"listen, Monty," I said, "your name is 'Monty' isn't it?"

"yes, you've got it right ..."

"I drove here and I've got to go and I want to know if the parking lot to this place is in the front or out the back or to one side"

"it's straight out the back ..."

"goodnight, Monty"

"goodnight...."

I knew which way was back. I
got off the stool and started
moving toward there.

IT'S* ALL SO CLEARLY SIMPLE

the night the dogs came by to say
hello
was near the time
to end it
as the ladies on the telephone
screamed their furies
at me.
the night the dogs came by to say
hello
I gave them cigarettes and beer
and they told me about the
poet
who had to go to Paris
to select his poems for his book of
selects
and we smiled at that
the dogs and I
and we thought about starvation
mornings
deadly noons
evenings of elephantine
miseries.
the dogs said that all that mattered was
enduring the obvious
it was all we were worthy of:
a minor bravery
beats
chucking it
although we weren't sure
why.
the dogs said that was the best
part: not being
sure.

the night the dogs came by to say
hello
we all mused about whatever happened to
Barney Google with the googly
eyes: probably died for the love of
a strumpet as many good men